

The Complete Christian is Christ-like

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much, everyone, for leading our worship this morning for Gerald, and that's a very good song that we're going to hear this morning. Turn with me, please, to James, the letter of James, James chapter 1. We'll finish this. We'll look at the other chapters in subsequent weeks. Please pray for the steering group, for the holiday club. Things are ironed out on that, what day, what time of day, whether it's morning, afternoon, or evening, and for those who will be involved. I commend it to you. Brian's good at what he does. He's a bit wacky. He's quite different from me. He doesn't look anything like me, Paul was saying, but it might be similar in terms of personality. He's got hair. I don't have hair. Anyway, but we're quite different, but we're similar in temperament, certainly, so hopefully you'll enjoy him coming. He's good with kids.

They have him eating out the palm of his hand. He's very good, and he's biblical, which is good. He knows the importance of the gospel, and that'll come across. So it looks like a circus tent, and they're all juggling. It's amazing how a Bible story comes out of them. I think I was quite impressed by that. The lion tamers is Daniel, and the lion's den, and so forth. There's a Bible story in each of them, which is very good. So I commend that to you. Also commend the Christian Institute here at the end of the month. I'll be surprised if this place isn't packed, and I mean packed. It's such an important topic. It's been my experience when we did this in London. Christians do come from other churches, and I know all those leaflets that Gerald has gone out to all the churches in Edinburgh, and in the Lothians, and in the Borders as well. So it's been well broadcast. So if you want to get a seat, come along and invite somebody else as well, especially a Christian. We need to know where we stand on assisted dying, on conversion therapy, and various other things. So I commend that to you.

So yeah, be here early, I would say, on that occasion. But be prepared, maybe, to give up your seat. If a visitor comes in, they have to stand. Anyway, that's that. Let's come before God. Let's ask for his help now, as we come to the letter of James. Our loving Heavenly Father, once again, we give you thanks, Father, that you have put a song in our heart, even praise to our God. We thank you for these songs that we've been singing, that express our faith. And we thank you, Lord, that as we sing them in worship and praise to you, we thank you even for the benefit that we get, Lord.

We find our hearts becoming warmed and encouraged in our faith. So, Father, we pray now as we come to your word, Lord, we sit under its authority. We accept it as the voice of God, not the wisdom of man. So, Father, we come as your children, Lord. Give us ears to hear what you would be saying to us.

And, Lord, as we consider the work of grace that you've done in our life, may these words light up for us this morning. So, Father, be with us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's read together.

[2 : 51] James chapter 1. We're only looking at the last two verses of chapter 1, but let's put it in its context. James is writing to Christians that are suffering. He wants them to be mature and so forth. But let's read together from verse 22 of chapter 1 of the book of James. James says, Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourself. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror, and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do. And here are our two verses. Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. That's our passage this morning. I can remember how I felt when I first became a Christian. It was, I never liked it when people discovered I became a Christian. You knew what it was like beforehand, and they often described my conversion experiences, so I see you've become religious. I never liked that, I must confess. A bit like these images, that's your say, religion with relics and dressing up like these guys. And I think, really, the last thing I wanted folk to think of what's happened to me was I suddenly had given up nightclubbing and doing whatever I was doing with my mates and what have you, and sitting in my house on Saturday night, polishing my rosary beads or lighting wee candles, and I turned into this wacky kind of person, that that wasn't really what conversions are all about, that there's a real

God, a real Savior who loved me, who died for me. He's come into my life. He's changed me, given me a future and a hope. My whole life now belongs to Him. Nothing wrong with maybe some of these things, but religion wasn't a word that I would use, and I always found myself having to correct what they understood had happened to me. I wasn't just religious, but I had been converted. I had been changed and given a future and a hope. And yet, in this letter, you would be surprised if you said to folk, you know, the word religion, you'll hardly find it in the Bible. But James mentions it here in these last two verses. Look at verse 26. Those who consider themselves religious, and then it says, religion that our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this. I wonder if you consider yourself religious this morning, or whether you're just converted. You'd say, I'm converted. I'm a Christian.

I'm a believer. I wonder how you would describe what God has done. Has it made you religious? What do we mean by that? Basically, what we mean by religion is not just something that we do. We just take up new actions and attitudes and so forth. One of the commentators says this, religion is the external manifestation of spirituality. It's basically God has done a work in our heart. We've become spiritual creatures, not just earthly-minded. We know God. We love God. We want to serve God. And it is the outworking of that that is religion. And really, that's what this means. It's about a heart relationship with God that expresses itself in certain things that we do and what we think and what God has done in our life. By way of recap, James, the leader of the church, the brother of Jesus, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, is writing to Christians right at the start, first verse, being scattered. And he's anxious that in their struggles that they are mature, complete, not lacking anything. That's the series, isn't it? The complete or the mature Christian.

Left to our own nature, James says in verses 14 and 15 of James chapter 1, that we are tempted, led away by our own evil desires. When it's given full reign, it brings birth to death. But God, and this is what we looked at last time in verses 18 and—sorry, verse 18—has done something in us.

[7 : 30] We don't just suddenly choose to become religious. That's what I was anxious to try and correct. I've not just suddenly fed up with that, and I think I'll try lighting candles and so forth. It's not just that. God has done something magnificent. Verse 18 is the key verse in the whole of the letter.

He, God, chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all that he created. The life of God is now in the soul of man, now in your soul. The very life of God comes. He's poured into you. You're a new creature. You're different. He chose you. He chose to do that work, not just for you on the cross, but in you. And this is really what's important.

And that's what we looked at last time. That's why he said the word that gave you life is the same word that will cause you to grow. Therefore, don't just listen to the word. Do what it says. So if you want to grow as a Christian, it's as simple as this. It's down to obedience.

If you're disobedient consistently, don't expect to grow spiritually in your walk and in your love with God. But as we hear God, as we first heard it in our sermon, in the gospel, or we read it in a book, that word that came to us in power and changed us is the same word that radically changes us, molds us day by day. So after this sermon and every subsequent sermon, we should resemble Jesus more. It's as real as that. We don't listen to sermons just for intellect or for information.

We do it for transformation to cause us to grow like this we plant in this image here. Now, James, as I said, isn't just throwing out random thoughts. There is a pattern. He says one thing, it triggers something else, so there's a flow. So what we're looking at now is his next train of thought. He's shown us about how we should view trials and temptations and so forth, and how we should view poverty. He's mentioned all this. We're different. Now he mentions three things that are essential to cause us to examine if we really are a work of God, and he mentions them in this passage, and these will consist of our three points this morning. He basically says, look at your life, look at these three areas. If you don't see these three areas, maybe your religion, this outward expression of an inward work that God has done, maybe it's useless. Maybe your religion is actually not much good. Maybe your coming to church isn't quite enough. Maybe your prayers aren't quite enough. And that's what he does. He doesn't intend these to be a comprehensive list, these three things, of religious activities, because we can still pray, we can meet for worship and fellowship, receive baptism, join the church, take part in the Lord's Supper. But he mentions these three specific things, and the first one is this, and these are the three we're going to look at, controlling the tongue, caring for the needy, and cleanliness from the world. He's basically saying that these are a sufficient test to see if God has really produced a spiritual life within us. Now why does he mention these three things? He mentions these three things because these three things closely resemble the work of the Father and of the Son. And in other words, where these three things are seen, we, it's basically like Father, like Son. And the Son, and he said, if you are a work of God, he chose to give you life through the Word of Christ. So the first test is the tongue. The second test is basically caring for the needy. And the third test, in other words, the Father looks to see if he's planted the seed of his own life within us. Three things. In fact, James, and this is what I really want us to note, James sees these three things. The rest of this letter now, chapter 2, 3, and 4, are taken up with expanding these three things. They are so important, he will now, after the rest of the letter, will begin to develop them further. He'll talk about a case. We'll begin to look at that next week, or two weeks on. Then chapter 3, that tongue. He'll expand on this further. And then chapter 3, right through to chapter 5, uncontaminated from the world. So these are not just three wee things, they are big things. And I think, and examine our own life and say, Lord, have you really done a work?

[12 : 02] Are these three things evident in my life? Controlling our tongues. Look at verse 26. Those who consider themselves religious, and yet deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

We're only going to look at that. So, but really just to pick these things up briefly this morning and look at them. Note the word he uses. We need to keep a tight... The very... James is great for images. He's always great for it. He never struggles for an illustration. He basically paints a picture of us here. It's a wild horse. It's as simple as that. You have a wild horse and rain on a horse that's just wanting to bolt. He's basically saying, if you're a Christian and God has done a work in you, you will know what that... You don't just speak the way you normally spoke and didn't care who you hurt.

As we're looking at that on Wednesdays, about when we fought and stuff, keeping a tight rein on this horse that's in our mouth. It's as real as that. A wild runoff in gossip. Complaining. Criticism.

Fault finding. Slander. Cruel. Being vindictive. It's amazing. We'll look at this when we come to chapter 3. How this tiny wee slab. Much trouble. It really is. It's such an important thing.

And you probably heard the way he was once confronted by a very critical woman who said, Mr. Wesley, the strings of your bow tie are much to serve and asked a woman to cut them or trim them to her liking after she did so. Wesley said, your tongue, madam, is an offence to me. I'd like to take some off. I would love to be able to say that. That would happen.

[13 : 38] Maybe felt that with people. Your tongue's maybe a wee bit too long. I think I'll trim a bit off of that. And we know this ourself. Even though the problem, the thing here is we see it in ourself.

And this is what James wants to address. Our true and fruitful religion. It reveals the condition of our heart. That's why there's something wrong with you. Your GP might send you for an MRI, a CAT scan or something, because he or she can't see what's happening. And then say, there is a problem. One of the best things is about the tongue. If you want to know the condition, if you want to know if somebody's spiritual or not, the tongue will show. It's like an open thermometer. I wasn't a Christian. And they used to have some strange sayings. You love that song, enjoy yourself. It's later than you think. But I always liked the wee expression he had where it says, better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove. I thought that was, that was, you're better to be. And it's the same. There's a lot of wisdom in that. If you see somebody that they've not said anything, evaluate them, they might be a good singer. It's only when you speak to them and they speak to you back, they begin to reveal. Are they judgmental? Are they a fine person, meek, mannered? That wee thing betrays us. It doesn't tell folk what we're like, but that betrays us. Jesus said the very same thing. A good man brings good in his heart. An evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth, that's Luke 6, 45.

The heart speaks what, or the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. It basically, and that's why James links the tongue to our whole body. We profess that God has chosen us to give us, and therefore the tongue will betray us. And we must consider, that's why I've said it's like, we're like Christ, revealed what he was like. When Jesus spoke, he spoke the words of the Father.

I did not speak on my own, Jesus says, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say, all the time leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me.

And that's a sense that they speak the Word of God. They are biblical, and they're thinking, and they're talking. You know you're speaking to some of the work in their life, and they betray themselves. They're not telling jokes all the time or doing whatever. There is something that the Word of God is important to them. They've been affected by it. They talk the Word of God. Never spoke the way this man does, John chapter 7, 46. Also, he did not revile or retire. He did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. As a sheep before it shears his mouth. So here we see Jesus not retaliating, meek and mild, and so forth. Jesus, his speech. And that's what James will say when it comes to chapter 3 and verse 2. We all stumble in many ways. It's perfect, able to keep his whole body in check. So the use of our tongue displays. Stick out your tongue, and they have a wee stick, and they used to look at the back of your throat, and often think, what on earth are you doing in there? Something happening there. It's been a long time since I do remember it. No, the stick brought out, and stick, and look at the back and go. At the minute, our tongue reveals very much the condition of our heart. So the first of these three marks of a self-examination. Are you, therefore, religious in that sense? Do you have a work that God has done in you, and is this seen in a healthy tongue? It's a challenge, isn't it? I don't know what your heart is like physically, and so forth.

[17 : 22] But the heart reveals, the tongue reveals our heart and what's happening there. So gee, but if you claim to be religious, and your tongue will either betray you or not, whether you're a non-Christian, and you're waiting them to hear, talk about the Word of God, talk about the Gospel, is we're not perfect in this. Is there signs that we really are a work of God by our speech? The second thing is this, is caring for the need that our God and Father accepts us pure and faultless. That really should pick up our ears. We're here in the presence of our Father. We want to be religious in that sense, show the work of God that He's done a religion that's pure and faultless. It's this, two things He mentions, but let's look at the first of them, cares and widows in their distress. So if the first test is an inward test, John, you're a Christian, and you're saying, if James was talking to me, he'd say, and you're telling me, yeah, I'm working, I heard the Gospel in the Kelvin Hall in 1980, I'm a Christian, he would say, well, what's the inward test? The inward test is the tongue, something there. This is an outward test.

This is something visible now. In many ways, it's maybe more. This outward test, this practical test, this caring, is very much in the heart of the Father and the Son. Peppered throughout the Old Testament that our Father cares for the poor and needy. God is God of gods, Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome. He shows no path. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving that as a heart of the Father. Psalm 68, verse 5, he's a father to the fatherless, a defender of... 6, verse 9, the Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow. Slaves, travelers, people who come in from other lands, are they cared for, and so forth. Ask yourself, why does James mention widows and orphans? Why doesn't he mention... In those days, those were the two classes of society that were vulnerable and open to...

treated poorly, and so forth. And this is something that angered God. If you know your Old Testament, condemn his people when they did not care for them. It's as real as that. Isaiah 50, thing I have chosen. This is the fasting he talks about. To loose the chains of injustice, untie the cords of the... to break every yoke. Is it not to share your food with the hungry, and to provide the poor, want the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Zechariah, do not. God, the Father, is known as a protector, as a carer of the vulnerable in society. Remember, came not just to preach the Word of God, but to show the heart of the Father, his own heart. He did this by tax collectors, by healing, by feeding, by providing for people.

You remember when John the Baptist was in prison, and he said, he began to wonder, is he really the one? What did he say? He didn't say, go back and tell them my teaching, go back and tell them that I'm the one. He said this, in Jesus cured many who had diseases, illnesses, evil spirits, gave sight to many who were blind. And he said to the Messiah, report to John what you have seen and heard. This is Luke chapter 7, verse 20. The blind receive their sight, cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the good news is proclaimed to the poor. In other words, he says, but to show the heart of the Father that resides in the heart of the Son. In other words, share for people who are lost and wandering.

So he did more than teach. He ministered to those. John, Jesus, say the same thing. John, the apostle of love in 1 John 3 says this, if you see a brother and sister in need and you have no pity, how can the love of God be in you, he says. In other words, that God has chosen to give us life and how we set our hearts at present because we love others, do not actions and in truth, John says. And it's this kind of aching, hurting people around us, packed on us. If you're a Christian, you must feel this. And sad to say that some Christian denominations are, sometimes the Church of Scotland or Church of England or Anglican churches, they do these suitcases standing with their banners and free this and so forth.

[21 : 58] Whereas Christians, sad to say sometimes evangelical Christians, we love our theology and we're notebooks and we're Bible studies and we're growing in the grace and in the often of time to bake somebody a pie or whatever, send a car, cut the grass for the sick. I remember doing door to door, just we always fed back afterwards and just a group of them, two of them come back and said, we went round, you'll never believe. And they weren't really interested. Garden was a mess. They were a mess. Their house was a mess and not interested. I remember saying to them, did you offer to cut their grass? Did you offer to do something? They just, they only saw a soul. We really, the local church needs to see this. Evangelicals need to, we know the gospel is ultimately saved. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? But they are more than a soul. They're a body. They're a man. To reach out to the whole person in social concern. One of the commentators say, when the world cries out for a good Samaritan. And there's a lot of truth in that. The world is looking for those good Samaritans and to reach out. So it's sad to say some churches are more interested and it doesn't really have a big impact. There should, there's caring, because it shows a local community that a church, Worcester Hills, has a heart. That this community know or mind and what we believe. And that drives us, isn't it? The gospel, John 3, 16, let them know. But we should be showing them that we have a heart, not just a mind. And that is, we need to do this at a church level. As I thought about this, I've pastored five churches. And one church, they already some kind of social outreach, cafe, furniture store or whatever. They were caring practically for people.

The other church, one other church began to do this after about four or five years. I was always looking at would bridge us into the community without being false or manufactured. And they eventually got this. The other churches, not so much. And as I thought about this, I looked at this area of social concern. They weren't really. They stayed, one actually went in decline, another two stayed.

The same. And I found that quite powerful. And I really have a heart for people. People is what drives the gospel. God so loved the world that He gave. Need to see this at a personal level, a church level, social concern. It's a big thing. And also a personal, the weak and the vulnerable, domestic abuse, homelessness, those affected by child, abortion, the abandoned child, social concern, racial injustice. But you're only interested in the gospel. I think there's something wrong when that's the case. So James is saying if you're religious, you really is messy.

It's a messy work. It's a costly work. James here remembers writing to folk. They're scattered. They've lost everything. And he tells them, if you think you're religious, care for the needy. You can just hear them say, but he still says this to them because it's in the heart of the Father. He doesn't say it doesn't matter. You're finding it hard. We should have a heart. Ask the Lord to give us a heart, not just a head for the lost, and an opportunity to respond. It's a great thing. And I pray for that regularly, not just for open hearts, but for maybe open heart that it can be all consuming. And you need to watch it. It doesn't detract you away from the gospel, but it needs to be both. Caring for people's bodies, minds, hearts, and their souls through the gospel. So if you would be complete, you must be king that God has done a work showing you you've been changed inwardly. You have a new heart and also a cleanliness or consecration from the world and to keep oneself from being polluted by extinction rebellion. They used to drive me nutty in London. You couldn't get going anywhere. Somebody's got up at the tube or on the road and whatever. And every night, the local news was always, yeah, they brought the M25 and so forth. That's a topic for another day, whether that's the right way to do that. We do need to care for our planet. They're not all crazies. But they're anxious that they care for the planet is not destroyed, and they will go to all sorts of lengths. Spiritual life that God has given us isn't destroyed. So we might not be so much involved. You should be aware of the spiritual battle that you face, that you live in a world of quality, and you need to fight against this. It's a daily struggle. It's very easy to set aside and to be just like the world. James, when it comes to chapter 4, will mention this. You adults with the world means enmity against God. Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. And seek to kill the life that's there. We need to watch our spiritual. He mentions the subtlety of this. Let me quote.

It is in the daily pressure of the often small things by which are large decisions, few of us would go far wrong. Yet faced with the world's ceaseless bombardment of imaginations, the world's insidious erosion of values and standards, the clamor for our time, easy to adopt a general way of life which, though it avoids the open pitfalls of sin, yet is not the style of the one who does not know Christ. In other words, you can live a life that is so subtle. There was a time when it was very much pummeled, be different from the world, don't just—whereas often now the church is saying the opposite. In their efforts to be attractive, we're basically saying, you're just the same. And the problem with that is, if we are just the same as them, they think, well, why would I need what you've got if you're saying the same? It's only when we are seen to be different that we become attractive to the world. Here, the thing, the secret with this is to be in the world, but not of the world. Well, I must confess, they were great. They would, in their early, even in their teenage years, they would come and speak to their mum and to myself, secrets whatsoever, in any of a wee book, this boy or whatever. They were just transparent all the time. It was great.

[28 : 16] What alcohol should I not drink? Alcohol is a right to date, a non-Christian. They would come out with all of this, and we gave them, as always, seek first the kingdom of God. You do that, put him first.

But also, this whole idea of being—there are three options here. You can be not in the world, and not of the world. That's who that is. You're not in the world. You're the person who sits and you dress differently, and Taylor Swift, it's just bad. Unless they wrote a song in the 1500s, you don't sing them. They're not in the world. They just repel people. You're just too weird. And I always say to her, girls, don't be in the world, but don't be of it. The other thing is being in the world and of the world. I'm in it, I like it, and I'm of it. But the thing is this, to be in the world and know. Where do you draw that? You're in the world. You're doing what the world is. You might listen to their music. You evaluate. You throw that out. You keep—but you're different. There are certain things you will pick up. You might go to music venues. You might do this. You might do—for girls, try and say, be in it. Don't be weird. Be approachable. Be winsome. They say, what is it about you? You are different. Don't be weird. Don't be worldly. Be wise.

That is the thing. Believe you, because everybody's in the world and of it is different. I mean, there'll be some Christians that will say, I don't mind a glass of wine. A glass of wine's fine. I said to them, if you go down that route, you cannot get drunk. Do not get drunk. You're not allowed to get drunk. What's the definition for another day? But I'd say that, but you're not allowed to get drunk. There are other folk who would say alcohols from the bowels of the devil's goats. Don't you realize? And they're going, right, okay. They all have different standards. So that's a difficult line to try and walk, to be in the world, but not of the world. Some other time, I commend that to you. Cleanliness from the world. Holiness. We must strive after those. The key to understanding the book of James is verse 18. He's chosen to give his new birth through the word of truth. What we'll see in our heart, and our heart will be revealed by our tongue. That's the first thing. Secondly, we will have not only, because that will reveal our heart, we will have a new will.

We will have a desire to care for those who are struggling. We won't just be saying, our father and the son will shine out when we see the needy. As Jesus was moved with compassion, so will we.

They're also different. We are a holy people. We are the church, the ecclesia, the called out ones of God. A quote from a commentary. Is it possible to be saved and fail in these areas? Saved and fail in these areas? Sure, he says, it is. But it is not possible in these areas and saved. And that's what I challenge myself with. If there's no evidence, it's useless. And that's what James wants to get across to us. We're going to stand there. We're going to sing that old hymn, Breathe On Me Breath.